



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

September 17, 2019



Compiled by Brent Hunt, Naval History and Heritage Command's Communication and Outreach Division

Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website (history.navy.mil), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ Arizona Survivor Lauren Bruner Passes Away

One of the last remaining [USS Arizona](#) survivors, from the Dec. 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, passed away in California, Sept. 10. Chief Fire Controlman [Lauren Fay Bruner](#) was 98. On the morning of the [Pearl Harbor attack](#), Bruner was one of only a handful who survived the explosion on *Arizona*'s magazine. On that horrific day, 1,177 of *Arizona*'s crew lost their lives. Only 93, who were aboard the ship at the time of the attack, made it out alive. Bruner suffered burns on almost 80 percent of his body and had been wounded by Japanese machine gun fire. Although he suffered for months, he recovered from his injuries and opted to return to sea duty serving aboard the destroyer [USS Coghlan](#) for the remainder of [World War II](#). After the war, he and fellow *Arizona* survivor, Don Stratton, fought persistently for many years to have a medal awarded to Chief Boatswain's Mate [Joseph George](#), (BM2 at the time) who they credited with saving their lives on that day. He also co-authored the book, *Second to the Last to Leave the USS Arizona*. Bruner will be [interred on Arizona](#) with his shipmates. For more on Bruner's life, [read the post](#) by Director [Sam Cox](#). Also, read the post Director Cox wrote when [he first meet Bruner](#) at the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor back in 2016.



Photo Link: https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/files/2016/12/IMG_0499_2.jpg

★ Operation Chromite: The Invasion of Inchon

"I can almost hear the ticking of the second hand of destiny," Gen. [Douglas MacArthur](#) told his subordinates on Aug. 23, 1950. "We shall land at Inchon, and I shall crush them." At the time, MacArthur was the commander in chief of United States Forces Korea. Two months earlier, the North Korean People's Army invaded South Korea, which had begun the [Korean War](#). MacArthur believed an invasion of Inchon—a main port just 15 miles away from the South Korean capital—would be key in regaining Seoul and destroying the morale of the communists' forces. For more on the amphibious operation that required nearly 70,000 men and 230 ships, [read the essay](#) by COD's Adam Bisno at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/art/exhibits/conflicts-and-operations/remembering-the-forgotten-war-korea-1950-1953/inchon.html>

★ WWII@75: West Virginia Rejoins Pacific Fleet

On Sept. 23, 1944, 75 years ago, [USS West Virginia](#) reached Pearl Harbor and rejoined the Pacific Fleet, marking the end of salvage and reconstruction efforts for the [ships damaged on Dec. 7, 1941](#). After the [Pearl Harbor attack](#), *West Virginia* was abandoned, settling to the harbor bottom on an even keel. By the afternoon of Dec. 8, flames from multiple fires on the ship had finally been extinguished. Later examination revealed the ship had taken multiple torpedo hits. With patches over the damaged areas of her hull, the battleship was pumped out and ultimately refloated. Then, on April 30, 1943, the ship departed Pearl Harbor for complete rebuilding at the Puget Sound Navy Yard in Bremerton, WA. Although *West Virginia* was heavily damaged and missed much of the war, she still earned five battle stars for her service during [World War II](#). For more, read the [Salvage of USS West Virginia](#) report and [Pearl Harbor: Why, How, Fleet Salvage and Final Appraisal](#) at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-navy-ships/battleships/west-virginia-bb-48/19-N-68376.html>

★ National POW/MIA Recognition Day

On Sept. 20, the U.S. Navy will join the nation in observing National POW/MIA Recognition Day. The day—observed annually on the third Friday in September with an official proclamation by the President of the United States—is set aside for Americans across the nation to honor those who were held captive and returned, as well as those who remain missing. According to the [Defense Department's POW/MIA Accounting Agency](#), more than [82,000 Americans remain missing](#) from [World War II](#), [Korean War](#), [Vietnam War](#), [Cold War](#), [Gulf Wars](#), and other conflicts. For more, go to NHHC's [POW/MIA: You Are Not Forgotten](#) page.

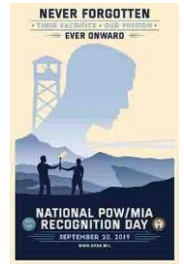


Photo Link: <https://www.pow-miafamilies.org/recognition-day-2019.html>

★ The Battle of Lake Champlain and the End of the War of 1812

In placid waters, the last great naval victory and subsequent end of the [War of 1812](#) occurred in upstate New York. The Battle of Lake Champlain, also referred to as the [Battle of Plattsburgh](#), took place when the U.S. war effort, in its final stages, was faltering on all fronts. By the summer of 1814, the British were on the offensive due to Napoleon's recent defeat in Europe, which freed up troops, ships and supplies that could now be used against the United States. In addition, British Gen. George Prevost, stationed just north of the Canadian border, received about 13,000 men as reinforcements—most he would use to take Plattsburgh and the rest of the Champlain Valley. Although the path was clear for Prevost to attack, he decided not to without a concurrent naval battle on Lake Champlain. Royal Navy's Capt. George Downie would guard Prevost's flank and secure supply lines, as British troops would attack. Both the general and captain felt a decisive British victory was well at hand. For more, [read the essay](#) by COD's Adam Bisno at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-51000/NH-51480-KN.html>

★ WWII@75: Occupation of Ulithi Atoll

On Sept. 23, 1944, 75 years ago, Soldiers from the U.S. Army's [81st Infantry Division](#), under naval task force command, occupied the isolated Ulithi Atoll unopposed, followed a few days later by a battalion of [Seabees](#). The atoll was strategically located in the Caroline Islands for the U.S. Navy's westward push across the Pacific close to both [Leyte Gulf](#) and [Okinawa](#). Although there were no port facilities initially, it was estimated the atoll was capable of holding hundreds of vessels. Within a month of the occupation, a complete floating base was in operation making way for the arrival of thousands of Seabees who transformed the tiny island into a premier forward naval base capable of refitting, resupplying and repairing ships. For more on [building the Navy's Bases in World War II](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/80-G-291000/80-G-291059.html>

★ WWII Navy Vet Awarded Medals 75 Years After Service

A [World War II](#) Sailor was awarded two combat decorations by Secretary of the Navy [Richard V. Spencer](#) in recognition of his meritorious service as an aircrewman in the European theater during a ceremony at the Pentagon, Sept. 10. Bernard Bartusiak of Chicago, now 95, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with gold star and the Air Medal, second through eight strike flight awards, in recognition of 20 combat missions completed from April 1943 to August 1944. "This honor may be overdue, but I am humbled by the opportunity to present it," said Spencer to the audience, which included Bartusiak's two daughters. For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#). For more on [naval aviation](#), go to [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=295997&t=1

★ Purple Heart Medal Stamps Available Oct. 4

The U.S. Postal Service announced the Purple Heart Medal Forever stamp is scheduled to go on sale nationwide, Oct. 4, to honor the sacrifices of the men and women who serve or have served in the U.S. military. The stamp is a redesign featuring a purple border matching the brilliant purple of the medal and its ribbon, and will be sold in self-adhesive sheets of 20. [The Purple Heart](#) dates back to Aug. 7, 1782, when President George Washington ordered the establishment of the Badge of Military Merit, in the shape of a heart and made of purple cloth. The medal is awarded to members of the military who have been wounded or killed in action against enemy forces or—since 2015—in acts of domestic terrorism. For more, [read the USPS release](#).



Photo Link: <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2019/0909-honoring-the-sacrifices.htm>

★ Happy Birthday, U.S. Air Force

On Sept. 18, 1947, the [U.S. Air Force](#) officially became a separate service with the implementation of the [National Security Act of 1947](#). Prior to the act, military aviation was divided among the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. The [Army Air Forces](#) was formed in 1941, from the previously established Army Air Corps, in response to the growing mission Army aviators were playing, and the need for a more independent command. At their height, the AAF had more than 2.4 million people, 80,000 aircraft in service and flew more than 2.3 million missions during [World War II](#). In 1947, many of the pilots and missions of the AAF moved to the newly formed branch of service. Since its inception, the U.S. Air Force has participated in every major combat operation, and today is regarded as the most capable and most technologically advanced air force in the world. Its mission is to defend the country in the air, space, and cyberspace through the skill and bravery of American Airmen. Happy 72nd Birthday U.S. Air Force!



Photo Link: <https://www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/459015/1947-breaking-the-sound-barrier/>

★ Constitution Day and Citizenship Day

Each year on Sept. 17, [Constitution Day and Citizenship Day](#) is observed to commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution on Sept. 17, 1787, and to “recognize all who, by coming of age or by naturalization, have become citizens.” The commemorations origin dates back to 1940 when it was designated on the third Sunday in May, as “I am an American Day.” It was changed in 1952 to Sept. 17 to commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution and to recognize all who have [attained citizenship](#).



Photo Link:

<https://www.facebook.com/ussconstitutionofficial/photos/pcb.10155920167776741/10155920147556741/?type=3&theater>

★ NHHC Webpage of the Week

In preparation for the 244th birthday of the U.S. Navy on Oct. 13, this week’s webpage of the week is the [Navy Birthday Toolkit](#). On this page, you will find a multitude of information and resources to help prepare for this year’s celebration. Included on this page are [Navy logos](#), [planning documents](#), [digital resources](#), [Navy historical information](#), and [archived content](#). This year’s theme is “No higher honor.” Since our nation was founded, the Navy has defended American interests and values around the globe. Make your event special. Use the resources NHHC has to offer, and celebrate the world’s greatest Navy!

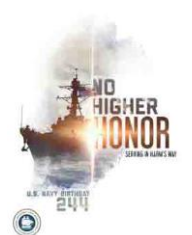
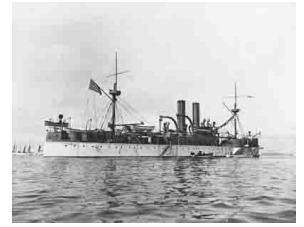


Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/commemorations-toolkits/navy-birthday/digital-content0.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Sept. 17, 1895, the battleship [USS Maine](#) was commissioned after nine long years of construction. Although *Maine* was the largest naval vessel built in the U.S. at the time, major design flaws, budget shortfalls and a host of other work-stoppage factors plagued the ship's construction. Initially, *Maine* was assigned to the North Atlantic Squadron operating on the U.S. east coast until late 1897 when the ship prepared for a voyage to Havana, Cuba, to protect American citizens in the event violence broke out in the Spanish struggle with the revolutionary forces in Cuba. Arriving on Jan. 25, 1898, *Maine*, with Capt. [Charles D. Sigsbee](#) commanding, dropped anchor in the center of the port and began watch operations. On Feb. 15, a tremendous explosion tore the battleship apart killing a majority of the crew. Fueled by an angry American public and overzealous newspaper coverage, on April 13, 1898, the House of Representatives voted 311–6 to use military force to end the hostilities in Cuba beginning what would become the [Spanish-American War](#). For more, read [H-015-3: “Remember the Maine! To Hell with Spain!”](#) at [NHHC’s website](#).



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance](#) at [NHHC’s website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.

Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-60000/NH-60233.html>